

# Beowulf

## XLII

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**A PERILOUS** path, it proved, he [footnote 1] trod  
who heinously hid, that hall within,  
wealth under wall! Its watcher had killed  
one of a few, [footnote 2] and the feud was avenged  
in woful fashion. Wondrous seems it,  
what manner a man of might and valor  
oft ends his life, when the earl no longer  
in mead-hall may live with loving friends.  
So Beowulf, when that barrow's warden  
he sought, and the struggle; himself knew not  
in what wise he should wend from the world at last.  
For [footnote 3] princes potent, who placed the gold,  
with a curse to doomsday covered it deep,  
so that marked with sin the man should be,  
hedged with horrors, in hell-bonds fast,  
racked with plagues, who should rob their hoard.  
Yet no greed for gold, but the grace of heaven,  
ever the king had kept in view. [footnote 4]

Wiglaf spake, the son of Weohstan:--  
"At the mandate of one, oft warriors many  
sorrow must suffer; and so must we.  
The people's-shepherd showed not aught  
of care for our counsel, king beloved!  
That guardian of gold he should grapple not, urged we,  
but let him lie where he long had been  
in his earth-hall waiting the end of the world,  
the hest of heaven. -- This hoard is ours  
but grievously gotten; too grim the fate  
which thither carried our king and lord.  
I was within there, and all I viewed,  
the chambered treasure, when chance allowed me  
(and my path was made in no pleasant wise)  
under the earth-wall. Eager, I seized  
such heap from the hoard as hands could bear  
and hurriedly carried it hither back  
to my liege and lord. Alive was he still,  
still wielding his wits. The wise old man  
spake much in his sorrow, and sent you greetings  
and bade that ye build, when he breathed no more,  
on the place of his balefire a barrow high,  
memorial mighty. Of men was he  
worthiest warrior wide earth o'er

the while he had joy of his jewels and burg.  
 Let us set out in haste now, the second time  
 to see and search this store of treasure,  
 these wall-hid wonders, -- the way I show you, --  
 where, gathered near, ye may gaze your fill  
 at broad-gold and rings. Let the bier, soon made,  
 be all in order when out we come,  
 our king and captain to carry thither  
 -- man beloved -- where long he shall bide  
 safe in the shelter of sovran God."  
 Then the bairn of Weohstan bade command,  
 hardy chief, to heroes many  
 that owned their homesteads, hither to bring  
 firewood from far -- o'er the folk they ruled --  
 for the famed-one's funeral. " Fire shall devour  
 and wan flames feed on the fearless warrior  
 who oft stood stout in the iron-shower,  
 when, sped from the string, a storm of arrows  
 shot o'er the shield-wall: the shaft held firm,  
 featly feathered, followed the barb."  
 And now the sage young son of Weohstan  
 seven chose of the chieftain's thanes,  
 the best he found that band within,  
 and went with these warriors, one of eight,  
 under hostile roof. In hand one bore  
 a lighted torch and led the way.  
 No lots they cast for keeping the hoard  
 when once the warriors saw it in hall,  
 altogether without a guardian,  
 lying there lost. And little they mourned  
 when they had hastily haled it out,  
 dear-bought treasure! The dragon they cast,  
 the worm, o'er the wall for the wave to take,  
 and surges swallowed that shepherd of gems.  
 Then the woven gold on a wain was laden --  
 countless quite! -- and the king was borne,  
 hoary hero, to Hrones-Ness.

### Footnotes.

1.

Probably the fugitive is meant who discovered the hoard. Ten Brink and Gering assume that the dragon is meant. "Hid" may well mean here "took while in hiding."

2.

That is "one and a few others." But Beowulf seems to be indicated.

3.

Ten Brink points out the strongly heathen character of this part of the epic. Beowulf's

end came, so the old tradition ran, from his unwitting interference with spell-bound treasure.

**4.**

A hard saying, variously interpreted. In any case, it is the some- what clumsy effort of the Christian poet to tone down the heathenism of his material by an edifying observation.